THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY

IN REGARD TO SPIRITUALISM.

A SERMON

BY JOHN BAKEWELL,

Rector of Grace Church, Topeka.

TOPEKA, KANSAS:
THE COMMONWEALTH STEAM BOOK PRESSES.
1875.

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TOPEKA, KANSAS, February 1, 1875.

To the Rev. John Bakewell, Rector of Grace Church.

DEAR SIR:—Having listened with great pleasure, and we think with much profit, to your able and interesting discourse, showing the inconsistency of the modern system of Spiritualism, so called, with Christian principles, and the Christian profession, and believing that a more extended dissemination of the views announced in that discourse would be very useful, we respectfully solicit, for ourselves and for many others who strongly concur with us, that the discourse be printed for wider circulation.

Very respectfully, your friends and parishioners,

J. W. FARNSWORTH,
GEORGE HENTIG,
GEORGE GEIGER,
S. W. STONE,
F. W. GILES,
N. F. HANDY,
JOHN L. MARX,
D. W. NELLIS,
WALLACE McGRATH,
S. K. LAKIN,
and others.

TOPEKA, KANSAS, February 2, 1875.

To J. W. Farnsworth and others.

MY DEAR BRETHREN:—It gives me pleasure to accede to the request contained in your kind note of the 1st inst.

Yours, in the Faith of Christ.

JOHN BAKEWELL.

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Deuteronomy XVIII, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 vs.—"There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer, for all these things are an abomination unto the Lord. * * Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee to do so."

Before approaching the subject of spiritualism, let me make one or two preliminary statements:

Some three years ago, this subject attracted a great deal of attention in this place, frequently occupying considerable space in the issues of the leading paper of this city. I desisted from referring to it in my pulpit ministrations at that time, partly because it was a new thing to me and had not received much thought, and partly because of a natural aversion to touch upon novel topics in the pulpit. The event proved that such a course was the wisest one, since public attention was gradually withdrawn from the subject.

Recently, however, this question has come before us all in a very startling way; and in speaking openly about it, I do not feel that I am now running the risk of advertising what seems to me to be grave error. Rather do I seek to guard those whose spiritual interests are committed to me against a danger to which they are one and all exposed.

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From this last statement you may infer how I intend to treat this matter. I hope to speak plainly, endeavoring at the same time to speak in love. God forbid that I should judge my brother. With those misguided men and women who are leaders in this new doctrine, here or elsewhere, I have no controversy. With them I have nothing to do, but to pray that God may bring them to repentance and a better mind. God is my witness that I speak not against them, but in your behalf; in speaking of their errors it is for your souls' health. May the good Lord enlighten our understanding, giving us the spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind.

We need not suppose, my brethren, that each of these names occurring in the text, necessarily denotes an entirely distinct pursuit. Several of these arts may have been practiced by the same person. We have here a carefully prepared list, as if Moses, even at the risk of repetition, sought to enumerate and condemn all persons whatsoever, who, in his day, dealt in such unlawful and superstitious practices. It was the sovereign will of the God of the spirits of all flesh, that man should hold communion with, and receive knowledge from Him *alone,* and through certain agencies which He himself authorized and with great care made known.

These agencies, under the first dispensation, were the Urim and Thummim, the dream or vision, and the prophetic utterance. Under the new dispensation God reveals His will and truth to us through the mediation of His Son, who gives us His Holy Word and the means of grace. It is both our privilege and our duty, under the Gospel, to commune with the Omnipotent and ever-present Spirit, who, in time past, created and now upholds all things, and has seen fit to *limit* our knowledge of the supernatural and of the future, to the *statements revealed* in the Holy Scriptures, "which contain all things necessary to salvation."

Having, once for all, made this abundant provision for His children—and who shall say it is not sufficient for all our deepest spiritual needs?—He forbids, in a most emphatic manner, all intercourse or attempted intercourse with the devil, with familiar spirits, or with the spirits of the departed, forbids all prognostications or attempted prognostications of future events by any magical art, or incantation, or charm, or medium whatever.

I give this as the result of a careful scrutiny of the word of God on this subject, and it seems strange that any one should come to any other conclusion.

In the Old Testament, while God is always represented as inviting His people to commune with Him in certain divinely appointed ways, He as constantly reprimands His own people and condemns heathen nations for having recourse to any other supposed supernatural power. The Old Testament is full of intimations implied or expressed, that His people should have nothing whatever to do with these things, "the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee to do so."

And when we turn to the New Testament, while it is filled to overflowing with miracles and revelations, all having to do with the Great Spirit above, all tending to produce the holiest communion with Him through His only Son, and by the Holy Spirit,—while it is so filled, I say, with these spiritual facts and glories, that it can not find much room to prohibit real or pretended communing with other spirits and powers than God, nevertheless it condemns this practice with the greatest abhorrence. You will believe me when I say that I am reluctant to read the passages referred to, but I cannot do otherwise. Says St. Paul, "the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, *idolatry*, *witchcraft*, * * * * * murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. v: 19, 20, 21 vs.) And to a like effect, perhaps in still stronger language, are the words of St. John: "Blessed are they that do His command-

ments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city," *i. e.* the New Jerusalem, "for without are dogs, and *sorcerers*, and whoremongers, and murderers, and *idolaters*, and whatsoever loveth and maketh a lie." Rev. xxii: 14, 15, vs.

We read these passages, my brethren, not to hurl a firebrand at those who practice Spiritualism, but for two reasons. In the first place, I desire to call the attention of those who see nothing wrong in real or pretended communing with the dead to the way, and, so far as I can discover, the *only* way in which the Bible regards this matter; and, in the second place, to set this whole subject before you in a serious light.

This is no trifling matter, as some regard it. It is not a harmless pleasantry. To attend a seance or circle is not merely to go to an entertainment. It is a countenancing of those things expressly forbidden by Almighty God. And, if any think I am altogether too serious, and that I misapply these passages, or if they assert that witchcraft and sorcery have nothing in common with Spiritualism, let me refer them at once to the case so often quoted by Spiritualists, and upon which they so much rely, viz: that of the bringing up of Samuel through the instrumentality of the witch of Endor. Some commentators have regarded that apparition as the deceptive result of her magical art. Others maintain that God saw fit to send Samuel in a miraculous manner to rebuke Saul, an opinion which receives great weight, from the evident fact that the woman was more surprised and terrified than King Saul himself, at the unlooked for success of her own efforts. Whatever interpretation is decided upon or is accepted, the Bible being the judge, and the decision depending upon this case of the witch of Endor, I ask, are not witchcraft and the attempted summoning of the spirits of the dead *the same thing?*

No! my brethren, it is no trifling matter when we see multitudes adopting this error, multitudes who in the end, give up all religion for Spiritualism, building thereupon a system of

philosophy which professes to rival and even surpass Christianity, while with horrible presumption it claims Christ Himself as the greatest of mediums.

And now let us turn to a few facts connected with the rise of Spiritualism, the modern* form of those magical and superstitious practices, which, in the times of the Bible, went under the name of enchantment, witchcraft or necromancy, which latter term, necromancy, if it means anything, means the attempt to consult the spirits of the dead.

Before doing so, however, let me remind you that man, *by the very constitution of his nature*, ever realizes to a greater or less degree, his mysterious relation to supernatural power. In this respect is best seen the vast difference between him and the lower order of creatures. We possess an intuitive knowledge and consciousness of mysterious power around us, and that we are influenced thereby for good or for evil. This feeling, my brethren, is the basis both of superstition and of faith; of faith where enlightened by revelation; of superstition where revelation is absent or perverted. Among the heathen it finds its expression in idolatry, in fetichism, in the worship of evil spirits, and in the wearing of amulets or charms for the prevention of evil influences. Among Christian nations, this feeling receives the sanction of the Divine law, which directs it to God in Christ as the one power upon whom all depend, with whom all should commune, whose will it is to influence all for good. We see, then, that the same feeling which under the Divine blessing ripens into *faith*, by which we commune with God and are made partakers of the Divine nature, when misdirected clouds the soul and disturbs the reason, making man the slave of superstition. Accordingly, *along side* of a true faith in the one God as the infinite and omnipresent power to influence men, has ever been found a superstitious belief in, and inter-

* Worthy of being noted in this connection, is Robert Dale Owen's own admission: "Gradually I reached the conclusion that what had been regarded as new and unexampled phenomena are but modern phases of what has always existed."—*Atlantic Monthly for November, 1874.*

course or attempted intercourse with, spiritual influences other than God.

This always has been so, and always will be so while human nature continues what it is; for, this belief in the supernatural, and this feeling of dependence upon it, which when properly directed leads to God, when perverted by sin, and made use of by the enemy of souls, inevitably leads to idolatry, to sorcery, to witchcraft, or to some kindred superstition. And in accordance with the well known law of supply and demand, as might be expected, these superstitious cravings are met more than half way by shrewd men who pretend to satisfy them, and lo! there comes to view an host of soothsayers, sibyls, oracles, diviners, mediums, and consulters of spirits in general. Their manifestations exposed, repressed, given up in one form, are followed by others. Those who reject as absurd one mode of these, are themselves the victims of another. For instance, those who laugh at witchcraft, believe second sight to be a supernatural gift. Those who maintain that there was no foundation for sorcery in olden times, believe in modern Spiritualism. If you are familiar with history, you are fully aware of this, and it will not be necessary for me to point to the annals of Greece and Rome, or of the Jews and Chaldees, to make good the assertion. There always will be occult science to the end of the world. Begotten of the love of the marvellous, fostered by morbid sensibility, stimulated by curiosity, animated by a desire to lift the veil of the future, and to see the inhabitants of the spirit world, it strikes its roots deep into the hearts of many who neglect God. I do not suppose it will die out till the Judgment. Yes! the trump of God will startle those who are devoting themselves to this thing, whether under the form of sorcery, or witchcraft, or Spiritualism, or whatever shape it may in future ages assume.

My brethren, the black art, like the fabled Phœnix, ever rises from its ashes. At the beginning of this century, we may safely say, that, throughout the civilized world, belief in these things and recourse to them had well nigh ceased, probably from

the effect of increased learning, which is the great antidote for superstition. Not many years ago, however, it was suggested that the agency of spirits might account for some of the alleged phenomena of animal magnetism brought to light at the close of the last century. Up to that time the vague and unsatisfactory results of mesmerism had been attributed to the operation of some undiscovered natural laws. But when once these things were fathered upon the spirits, they forthwith obtained most devoted attention from the many, who, at the slightest notice, are ready to accept the marvellous and incredible, while they do not care the snap of a finger for the scientific. At first the Rochester knockings, table-turnings, and other queer things were produced. The marvel grew, until at the present time phenomena far beyond the original manifestations are shown, such as communications from spirit hands, speaking with tongues, spiritual photography and drawings, the materialization of spirits, and I know not what. And these new things, which at the start should have been called by their old and proper names, and should have been abhorred by all right minded people, found the public totally unguarded against them. Hundreds of the curious and the superstitious, instead of remembering that the word of God condemns these things, patronized them. Mediums sprung up everywhere. Many discovered to their own astonishment, that they themselves were mediums. Men and women of a highly sensitive and nervous temperament readily fell victims to the novelty. Men and women of intellectual force, but unimbued with the spirit of the Scriptures, became its apologists and zealous advocates. Societies of Spiritualists have been started in every city of importance. A system of philosophy has been built upon these phenomena. Members of churches have become its devotees, at first thinking to hold both faiths, but in the end finding that one or the other must be abandoned. And on every side people are questioning and surmising, some ridiculing, others convinced of mysterious agency; some attributing the wonder to the devil, others deeming it a heaven-sent revelation, the complement of Christianity; and every one is anxious to find out the truth or the falsity of

the thing. And this brings us down to the present moment, and to our duty as Christians in this matter.

You may have observed that I have not attempted to expose these things as the tricks of impostors, nor have I admitted that they are produced by the spirits of the dead. But I have said, and will most positively and unreservedly affirm, that whether true or false, they are prohibited by the word of God, and are to be abhorred by Christian people. Should I desire to do so, I have no means of showing that consulters of familiar spirits, all the way back to the Cumaean Sibyl, to Simon Magus, or to the witch of Endor, were tricksters and impostors. Whether there be supernatural support for these things or no, I care not. *One thing I know*, that such practices, when covered with the cloak of spiritual agency, are against the law of the Supreme God. And, I prefer to take this position, not only because I deem it the position of the inspired writers, but because the advocates of this system in these United States, have gained tremendous advantage by mystifying people as to the point in controversy. They say to us, if you can not show these things to be false, believe them true and on this evidence receive Spiritualism; and thousands—many in this place—have fallen victims to their sophistry. For observe carefully: should we admit that these phenomena are real and not tricks, it does not necessarily follow that they result from the agency of spirits; and even if we grant that they result from the agency of spirits, it does not necessarily follow that they are produced by the spirits of the dead, or that Spiritualism is true. The question to be decided is, whether it is right to have anything to do with phenomena which are said to result from supernatural agency. Are we at liberty to consult the spirits, if spirits they be? Is this practice condemned by God's word, or is it not? Ought I, as a follower of God, to touch it, or to have anything to do with it? What is the tendency of this thing? What its effect upon those who advocate it? Are they made better Christians thereby, or do they generally become sceptical?

These are the questions; and well would it have been for this country and for the church of God, if, when so called me-

diums professed to summon the spirits, all Christian people and all people nominally Christian, all people blessed by Christianity directly or indirectly, had refused to tamper with it or participate in it under the plea of curiosity, or from a desire to detect and expose what they regard as a specious fraud. It is this attention which it has received from those whose Faith it betrays, that has gained it notoriety, filled the pockets of its advocates, swollen its ranks and maintained its many publications.

And this position, that we deem moral and religious people called upon to abstain from and condemn these things, and not called upon to settle by inspection their truth or falsity, is, as was said above, in accordance with the Scriptures. Throughout that sacred book, as might have been expected, there is constant reference to magical art; for magical art is the chief characteristic of heathendom. Everywhere does the Bible speak of it as something, which, in its nature and tendency, leads men away from God and His service. The jealous God will have men inquire of Him, obtain knowledge from Him and in conformity with His laws, and from no other source; and everywhere in Holy Writ the power of God is vindicated as infinitely above the alleged powers of darkness and of sorcery.

But while the Scriptures show the weakness, folly and ruinous result of such things, we find therein no clearly defined statement that these things have or have not any real foundation in spiritual agency. From some passages we might infer that the magicians did accomplish something of a supernatural character; from other passages we might infer that what these enemies of God produced was merely the result of trickery. It appears, then, that it is not the intention of Scripture definitely to decide about these things one way or the other, but to lay down the rule that whether real or pretended they are instigated by the devil, and are made use of by him to entrap the souls of men. Men quote Scripture as authority for Spiritualism, they might as well quote Scripture as authority for the worship of false gods, because here and there the Bible speaks as if there were false gods.

I desire earnestly that you should not misunderstand me. I do not say that the phenomena of mesmerism or animal magnetism are the work of the devil. If there is anything in them of an unusual nature, it comes undoubtedly under the operation of natural laws. As such, it is proper enough to investigate them; and in such investigation, if undertaken in a Christian spirit, there can be no danger. But the moment these phenomena are produced as the results of magic or attributed to the agency and presence of spirits, and practiced by persons who regard Spiritualism as a new Gospel, seeking revelations and comfort therefrom, and not from the word of God, making this their religion, ascribing to it, and to the philosophical system built thereon, that moral power for good that belongs only to the Bible—the moment this transpires, all Christian people, and all moral people should abhor it as destructive of Christianity.* and, indeed, of all morality.†

I am not here to discuss the character of these phenomena, or to state whether I think them illusory or real. One thing I will say: They are either illusory, or are produced by the operation of some unknown natural cause, or they reveal the working of evil spirits. Certainly these things as presented to us by Spiritualists, are not of God, neither are they in any respect analogous to the Christian miracles. They are not of God, because God does not work in the dark, nor is there anything divine about them. There is nothing in them to do us any

*Spiritualism, in the opinion of Robert Dale Owen, denies: 1st, The doctrine of original sin. 2d, That man can be justified only by the blood of Christ. 3d, The doctrine of righteousness by faith. 4th, The existence of the devil. 5th, That miracles were wrought to prove the divinity of Christ. 6th, The plenary inspiration of the writers of the New Testament. 7th, That death is the punishment of sin.—*Atlantic Monthly for December, 1874.*

In the same connection he says: "If belief in these tenets is essential to constitute a Christian, *then is Spiritualism opposed to Christianity.*" Comment is unnecessary.

†It is well known that the doctrine of spiritual affinities is a prominent principle in that system which has been built upon Spiritualism, the Harmonial Philosophy. According to this doctrine a man may have a spiritual affinity for a woman who is not his wife. As men and women are now constituted, the tendency of this is to nullify the marriage relation.

good, nothing to make us purer and more self denying, nothing to help us or lead us nearer to Him. On the contrary, as proven by a thousand cases, they lead away from God and undermine the Christian faith. Neither can we have reason to believe that they are produced by the spirits of the departed. According to the express statements of Holy Writ, the good and the bad go to their own place, they never come back until the resurrection. The instances of their return mentioned in the Bible are manifestly exceptional, and are clearly seen from the context to be of an extraordinary and miraculous character. And we assert that, upon all correct principles of interpretation, these instances are utterly inconclusive as proof that the spirits of the dead do ordinarily return to earth, when carefully set over against the many statements, direct and indirect, that they have no power to do so. I wish I had time to elaborate this point and cite passages, but it is not possible within the limits of this sermon.

Another thing about spirits I wish particularly to say, inasmuch as few realize its truth: There are spirits constantly around us, but they are *not* the spirits of the dead. While Scripture does not say one word about the presence of the dead, it does assert this again and again in respect to the angels. Angel appearances crowd the Bible as thickly as bright stars the firmament of God. And God's angels are about us now. "They rejoice over one sinner that repenteth." "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

And according to Scripture, angels of evil are near us, too; lying spirits, who seek to seduce men from the faith, accursed emisaries of him who "goeth about seeking whom he may devour." "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against *wicked spirits** in high places." Now good angels can not be concerned in these dark doings, and if they were, might we not say with St. Paul: "Though an angel

*Marginal reading.

from heaven preach any other Gospel, let him be accursed." If then, these things are to be ascribed to spirits at all, it will not take long to decide what kind of spirits are likely to have a hand in them.

But to return; as to the character of these phenomena, whether real or illusory, it is not necessary that I should state my opinion. I am not here for that purpose. Such a statement would not be relevant to the point really at issue, and would involve much discussion. Discussion is precisely what the Spiritualist wants. He will ever be the gainer thereby. He courts investigation, *provided you will submit to his conditions.*

But I will not consent to witness these things with my sight obscured by turning down the light, my hearing deadened by the sound of music, my sense of touch crippled by having my hands held, and my mind confused by that sense of mystery which oppresses us when we come under the influence of superstitious feeling. I will not consent to these things, not because I am afraid, but because to witness them would be of no use, and do me no good; and, more than all, because I fear God and will not participate in that which He condemns. I will not expose myself to the temptation of the devil, who has undoubtedly used these things, whether real or pretended, to unsettle the reason of many a nervous and sensitive person, and to ensnare the souls of thousands while he represents himself as an angel of light.

But I must bring these remarks to a close, and in doing so let me lay before you in a familiar and friendly way, what I conceive to be your duty in regard to Spiritualism:

Do not imagine that you are called upon to decide in some practical way, whether there is anything in Spiritualism or not, or whether these things are real or illusory. If real, they cannot give you anything better than what you possess in the blessed Gospel of Christ; in either case, they are contrary to the will of God.

I advise you, as your pastor, not to countenance these things, nor to participate in them. Would you have gone to

consult familiar spirits had you lived under the Old Testament dispensation? Certainly not, with such a plain text as this before you. But, you say, King Saul went. Yes, he *did, after he was forsaken of God for his sins.* It will be time enough for you to go when you are in like circumstances.

But, you say, my motive is a different one, I want to investigate. Hundreds have gone for the same purpose—and—have —become—Spiritualists.* You cannot afford to run such a risk.

Were these mediums professional jugglers there would be no more harm in witnessing their performances than in attending any exhibition of legerdemain. Or, if persons were to get together and seriously seek to find out what laws of nature are involved therein, there would be nothing wrong. But to assist in producing these things on the basis of Spiritualism, is a very different thing.

Do not allow a morbid curiosity to influence you in the premises. What was it brought sin into the world and all our woe. Curiosity, first entertained, then yielded to by Eve. Is not hers clearly a case where curiosity was a suggestion from the evil spirit. Let it not be so in your case. We repeat it, that the ranks of Spiritualists have been recruited from the curious, and from those who fancy themselves investigators.

But you reply that you are proof against the doctrine and will not be satisfied until you have investigated for yourself. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." It may be that you are proof against it, but suppose some person of a morbidly sensitive temperament should be led by your example to attend a seance, and become in the end a Spiritual-

*This result has happened, not, as some say, because Spiritualism needs only to be investigated to be proven true, but partly because these persons were not on their guard against a fallacy referred to a moment since, viz: that Spiritualism must be regarded as true if these phenomena cannot be explained, and partly because they were, in no sense, prepared to investigate. Not one person in a thousand is capable of investigating properly, This office requires scientific knowledge and acumen, acquaintance with the laws of evidence, skill in elaborating hypotheses, a cool detective spirit of analysis that is thrown off its guard by no manœuvre or blind, overlooks no possible clew, and neglects no possible precaution.

ist, would you be entirely free from blame? What possible good can investigation do? Has exposure stopped these things elsewhere? Did it shut the mouths of those who, in the opinion of one of the leading Spiritualists in this country, acted a deceptive part in the so called materialization of Katie King? Be assured that if one thing is exposed another will take its place. The problem whether man can deal with spirits is as old as the world itself, and no earthly power can put an end to attempts in this direction. To be successful in doing so you would have to change human nature. And, Oh! beware, lest in seeking to do so, you become partakers in other men's sins.

Finally, what is the conclusion of the whole matter. Let me entreat you, each for yourself, to find it in these words contained in our text: "As for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee to do so."